

When It All Comes Back by littledaybreaker

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Summary: When Beverly and Ben returned to Nebraska, they thought the evil really was over for good. In Texas, George Amberson, the "man out of time" also thought he had outrun his demons. But when something happens to Ben and Beverly's daughter, they all realize that there are some things that you can never really outrun.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note: I've categorized this as both being a fanwork for "IT" the book and "IT" the 2017 film because it technically is. For timelines' sake I used the novel's timeline because frankly I didn't want to do too much speculation on what kind of shitshow 2020 will be. It should be fine for you to read if you've never read the book; just know that the book takes place between 1958 and 1985. This work crosses over with 11/22/63, but only the book because I never watched the television show. If you've never read the book I don't believe it's necessary, all you really need to know is that the main character is a time traveler, he went to Derry early in the novel, and he met Beverly and Richie. If you HAVE read the book, this exists on an alternate timeline, one where rather than staying in the present, Jake George chose to go back and meet Sadie and marry her. The song being referenced when Beverly gets into her car is "Poor Little Fool" by Ricky Nelson, which came out in 1958. The song that is referenced in the rest of the text is "All I Have To Do Is Dream" by the Everly Brothers, which also came out in 1958. This is part one of an ongoing story.

It had taken them two years and three months to have her. The number would've terrified Beverly, and undoubtedly Ben, if they'd stopped to think about it. But they never had. They'd married in short order and set to work on making a baby straight away, thinking that the threat really was over, and maybe, with the thin film of the curse having been lifted, things would be different now.

The doctor they'd seen had told them it might take a little while due to their ages, but he didn't see any reason why they couldn't have a baby, although Bev had heard that one before. Nonetheless, it felt different, and sure enough, twenty seven months later, Eden Hope Hanscom, 7 pounds 2 ounces, healthy as can be, arrived in the world.

Although they had every reason to worry, every reason to question whether bringing a child into the world was the right thing, every reason to be afraid that someday she may have to face the horrors of a world far darker and crueller than anyone could invent, it seemed that the

forgetfulness that had permeated the twenty-seven years between the first and the last times they had stood together with their friends in Derry had allowed itself to permeate their consciences once more, fall heavy like a blanket over them.

They enjoyed a quiet life together, the three of them. Eden grew and thrived, beautiful, smart, and sweet. Ben worked, Bev worked, and when they weren't working they spent every spare moment they had adoring Eden, giving her everything a baby could possibly want. The threat was long over and their lives were at peace at last. There was nothing that could possibly break the bubble that the Hanscoms had made. The world was, for once, at total peace.

August 1989

Lincoln, Nebraska

"Be good, Edie. Mommy will see you after work, okay? I love you." Beverly waggled her fingers at her toddler's retreating backside, but it was useless—Eden, almost 2 and a half now, was already waddling full speed ahead toward the water table in the backyard of her babysitter's house. At 7:30, the day was already hazy, a humid fog hanging over the city. It was a summer not unlike the summer of 1958 in Derry, but Beverly wasn't thinking about that. She was thinking, at that particular moment, of her 9 am meeting in Omaha, of the traffic on the highway, of whether or not she had time to get a coffee, of the idea of another baby—an idea that, she thought, she'd bring up to Ben that night. She was smiling distractedly as she handed over Eden's diaper bag to her babysitter, thanked her and said goodbye, casting one more glance into the back of the house, where Eden was splashing in the water table, squealing with delight, before turning back to the car and driving away, humming along with the song that was playing on the radio. *"She told me how she cared for me, and how we'd never part. And so for the very first time, I gave away my heart. Poor little fool, oh yeah, I was a fool, uh huh..."*

At 12:30 that afternoon, Beverly Hanscom was sitting in a McDonalds in Omaha, fries scattered on her tray, celebrating a successful meeting and the successful sale of her newly designed line of children's clothes before heading home to pick Eden up early from the sitter's. Maybe they'd get an ice cream cone and go to the park,

she thought dreamily, or go downtown and surprise Ben at his office, they could go to the park and feed the ducks. She could see that, yes, Eden pointing and yelling, "DADDY, SEE THE FUCKS, DADDY?", Ben's warm full body laugh, the sun glinting in his hair. Yes, that's what they'd do. She finished the last of the fries, tossed the trash, and headed back to the car, smiling in recognition of the song on the radio this time. It was the one she and Ben had danced to at their wedding, the one she sang to Eden every night. She glanced into the empty back seat, catching sight of the pink ear of Eden's teddy tucked in next to her car seat, and, for reasons she could not explain to herself, she reached back to pick it up, propping it up in the front seat before driving away, singing: *"dream dream dream, when i want you, in my arms when i want you and all your charms, whenever i want you, all I have to do is dream, dream dream dream, when I feel blue, in the night and I need you to hold me tight, whenever I want you, all I have to do is dream..."*

Meanwhile, in his office in Lincoln, Ben Hanscom had just finished a business lunch. It was with people he didn't particularly like, over a building he wasn't particularly crazy about, but it had gone well and he was cheerful when he returned to his office. His schedule was clear for the afternoon but there were a few drawings he wanted to get started on. On the desk, the picture he had there, taken just 3 months earlier at Eden's second birthday-Beverly, holding Eden up to press a kiss to the side of her face, Eden in her white dress with carefully embroidered birthday cakes-Beverly's work, of course-wrinkling her nose, caught his eye and he lingered on it a moment, smiling, reflecting: how lucky he was. How beautiful his life was, so much more beautiful than he could have ever imagined. He had a sudden, almost impulsive thought, that he should phone Bill and check in, see how he was doing, maybe even Mike. It didn't strike him as weird, not in the moment. They kept in touch, still, maybe not as often as they should, but in the companionable way old friends did. He would call Mike when he got home, after dinner, and Bill in the morning, knowing it'd be late before he could call. Satisfied with that, he smiled to himself, sitting at the drafting table and flicking on the radio, humming along with the song-a pleasant surprise in and of itself. *"...I can make you mine, taste your lips of wine, any time, night or day. Only trouble is, gee whiz, I'm dreaming my life away..."*

Not quite nine miles away, Eden Hanscom was alone in the fenced back yard of her babysitter's house. Karen, her babysitter, had popped in the house for just a minute, carrying one of the other girls, Brittany, into the house with a bump on the head. She'd tumbled down the stairs, seemingly without warning, and cried in such a way that Karen had come flying out of the house to investigate. "I'll be back in a minute," she told Eden, rushing Brittany into the house, shushing and comforting her. For Eden, the shock of the whole thing had passed just as quickly as it had come on, and she'd been perfectly content to dig in the sandbox out there by herself. She heard someone say her name-a voice that was both familiar and unfamiliar-but a two-year-old's scan of the yard revealed nobody, so she'd continued to dig, chatting away to herself, for several minutes until she heard something much more familiar: her mother's voice, singing: *"I need you so that I could die, I love you so, and that is why, whenever I want you, all I have to do is dream..."*

"MOMMY!" Eden squealed, launching herself up out of the sandbox and waddling as fast as her chubby legs could carry her toward the front gate, toward her mother's voice. And there she was, just beyond the fence, smiling through at Eden. "Mommymommymommymommy," she chanted, clapping her hands.

Then, all at once, her mother's hand reached through to open the gate-and it wasn't her mother's at all. It was long, papery white, with long, long fingers-claws, really-that were capped by long yellowed nails. All of a sudden, there was a smell in the air, an odd silence, and Eden whimpered.

"It's only me, Eden Hope," the thing with her mother's voice said. "It's your mommy. I've brought you something, don't you want to see it?"

Eden nodded, and then, all of a sudden, she *could* see it, a lovely helium balloon, bright red, bobbing there just above the fence. Eden clapped, giggling, and suddenly the hand was her mother's again, opening the gate. "Mommymommymom-" Eden began, but stopped abruptly. The thing with her mother's voice was standing in front of her now, leering down. It was a clown. But Eden Hanscom had never seen a clown, and so she had no name for the thing that stood before her, with its orange hair and a leering smile. It handed her the balloon, and Eden reached for it-only to be snapped up, almost

instantaneously. The thing that had once had her mother's voice now seemed to be all teeth, its horrible breath worse than Dunkin, her neighbor's dog, who sometimes knocked her over in the yard and licked her face until she said "stinky stinky, go away!" and her mother came to retrieve her. "Stinky stinky, go away," Eden tried, but the thing just laughed. "You aren't supposed to be here!" the thing shrieked. "You aren't, you aren't, you aren't!" and then it bit down, making a horrible crunching noise, ripping Eden's arm from its socket. She froze in horror, in shock and pain, and then she screamed once, her blue eyes widening and then drooping as her blood drained from her. "You aren't supposed to be here!" the thing repeated, flinging her across the yard, where she hit the big oak tree and crumpled to the ground, her spine shattered. "You aren't supposed to be here, so now you're not!" And then, seemingly satisfied with its work, it disappeared as quickly as it had come.

Karen Millington had been babysitting in her home for five years. She'd been babysitting for Eden Hanscom in particular since Eden was three months old. In five years, she'd never had an incident more serious than a bloody nose or a shiner-never so much as a broken bone. So she was not, perhaps, as concerned as she should have been when she heard Eden's scream from the open window of the upstairs bedroom where she'd just finished putting Brittany Emerson down for a nap. She headed down the stairs quickly but not urgently, calling out, "you're okay, Edie," even before she'd opened the screen door. Once she had, however, that was when the scene unfolded, a scene like none other that she'd ever seen, never once in all of the crime dramas and horror movies she'd ever seen. Eden Hanscom's arm was sitting neatly on the child sized picnic table on the deck, and attached to it was red balloon, bobbing gaily in the light summer breeze. "Eden Hanscom was never meant to be born", the balloon's text read, "now she's where she's supposed to be!" As if this wasn't horrific enough, there was the rest of her-slumped in a pile beneath the big tree, her legs and remaining arm at odd angles as if every part of her was broken. She was upside down, her neck at an angle, her blue eyes open, staring, as if they'd seen an unimaginable horror before they died. As Karen walked, almost robotically, towards the corpse of Eden Hanscom, there was an eerie silence, as if the whole world had stopped-but somewhere, at some neighbor's house, a radio played faintly, crackly but still, somehow, clear as day: "*I can make*

you mine, taste your lips of wine, any time, night or day. Only trouble is, gee whiz, I'm dreaming my life away. I need you so that I could die, I love you so, and that is why, whenever I want you, all I have to do is dream...dream, dream, dream..."

It was Sgt. Martin Dollanger's first ever homicide call. His three years on the Lincoln police force had been relatively quiet ones. Mostly traffic stops, domestic disputes, a few drug busts, teenagers being rowdy. He couldn't lie-he liked it that way. He'd never liked a lot of excitement, would have much rather been an accountant or a bookkeeper or a banker or some other quiet job like that, but his grandfather and his father had both been Lincoln cops, his brother David had been one too, for seven years, before the cancer had taken him in '86. It was so tragic, everybody said, he was only 28, so young, never married, so handsome...how strange, of course, that he'd left everything he had to his roommate Bobby. Only Martin had known the truth about Bobby and David, and now Martin was expected to carry the secret *and* David's legacy.

He hadn't been sure what to expect when he arrived at 8601 Smith Street. He knew it was a toddler-only two years old-and the name, *Hanscom*, seemed familiar to him in some free floating way. It wasn't until he arrived at the scene and saw the stricken man who must've been Eden's father that he could place it. He was that architect guy; Martin had remembered seeing him on TV maybe a year ago when that big museum he'd designed opened up in New York. Ben was his name, he thought, maybe Bill? No, it was Ben. The little girl had been on TV, too, and his wife. The baby was a pretty little thing, redhead, looked like her mother. Martin had remembered watching them, everyone smiling and waving like some kind of royalty, and thinking to himself, *"Well, would you look at that. Now there's a guy who has it all."* And now here he was, in the flesh, a hollow shell of the man who had been on TV. Soberly, Martin introduced himself, apologized for his loss the way he'd been trained to do, and ushered him into the living room where he would sit with the wailing Karen Millington and Susan, the lady from victim's services who Martin's partner must have called before they left the station.

His partner, Don Chrismuth, was 50 going on 90, a 30 year veteran of the force. He didn't particularly like Martin, but Martin liked him-

something about his grizzly face and smoker's voice reminded him of his own father, now long retired, and it was comforting to him in a way he couldn't place. Don was already in the yard-*the crime scene*, Martin corrected himself, almost giddily-when Martin strolled out. "Did you see that her dad's that designer guy? Sad, right? So, do you think the babysitter did it? Had to have, right? Screaming and wailing and carrying on like that. What do you think happened? Beat her? Don-Don?" it took him several moments to realize that Don-big, imposing Don, grizzled Don, Don who was fond of telling Martin that he'd seen horrors that Martin couldn't even begin to *imagine* policing in this city, was hunched over, shoulders wracked with sobs, near the tree. Martin approached him slowly-completely missing the arm on the picnic table as he did-and touched his shoulder. Don looked up at him, wiped his face, and when he rose, Martin could see what he was looking at. It was the body of the little girl, one arm ripped off, blood soaking the front of her little pink romper. Her body was crumpled at an angle Martin hadn't ever even imagined that a body could crumple at, her little red pigtails streaked with dirt, and her eyes were wide open, her mouth ajar as if she'd died screaming.

Don Chrismuth would retire later that year, citing wanting to spend more time with his newborn granddaughter, but Martin Dollanger would spend another 25 years serving Lincoln's finest. Even in his later years on the force, he would tell anyone who listened that he'd never seen anything worse than the scene at 8601 Smith the day that Eden Hanscom had died.

August 1989

Jodie, Texas

On the morning that Eden Hanscom died, George Amberson awoke in the bed he shared with his wife of 25 years in the small town of Jodie, Texas, drenched in sweat and panting from a nightmare. It wasn't the first time he'd dreamt of the Yellow Card Man-the first time in a long time, yes, but not the first time-but it was the first time he'd dreamt of Derry, Maine.

In the dream, he was a young man again, roaming the streets of that bizarre funhouse of a town. This time he followed the sound of Glenn Miller and His Orchestra playing *In The Mood* with a smile on his face

and a pep in his step, as if he was going to greet an old friend. In a way, he supposed, he was. He approached the kids companionably, waving to them. "Richie from the ditchie," he said, smiling, "and Bevvie from the levee. Long time no see."

But the kids did not greet him. Instead they jumped back, Bevvie-from-the-levee turning to look at him with wild, angry eyes. "YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE," she screamed. "YOU'RE NOT, YOU'RE NOT, YOU'RE NOT!"

And then her face turned, changed, became the face of the Yellow Card Man, of Frank Dunning, of Lee Harvey Oswald, of that unnameable monster he thought of as the Jimla, and that was when George awoke, startled, knowing something was very, very wrong.

It was an ordinary enough day. He'd mowed the lawn, ran a few errands, went down to the school to prepare a few things for the first day, only 10 days away, and then in the afternoon had picked his twin daughters, Donna and Deborah, 14 years old-his and Sadie's "change of life" babies after years of miscarriages, trying, and a baby boy who had died at ten days old-swung by the Dairy Queen to get them ice cream cones and listen to them chatter about their day, about all the junior high gossip they could pack in. At the last minute they swung by Al's Diner, now owned by one of the young fellows George had taught in his earliest years in Jodie, and picked up hamburgers for dinner. It was a good day, the kind of warm late summer day he'd come to treasure, and by the time he arrived home, the dream had receded and a sense of normalcy had set in and continued on until late in the evening. The girls were in their room, giggling away, and George settled in with Sadie on the couch for the 11 o'clock news. It was a whole lot of the usual-Congressman Leland's death, contras in Nicaragua, Hezbollah...and then.

"The murder of 2 year old Eden Hanscom of Lincoln, Nebraska, is rocking our nation today," Tom Brokaw said, "Hanscom was found murdered in the back yard of her babysitter's home just after 1 pm. Her babysitter was questioned but released and so far no charges have been laid. NBC's local contingent in Lincoln reports that the Lincoln police department has solid leads in the case."

"How sad," Sadie murmured, and George nodded his agreement, taking her hand. The faces of Eden and her family filled the screen

momentarily, and George's heart stopped. There she was, plain as day: Bevvie-from-the-Levee, older now but still beautiful, still instantly recognizable, beaming into the camera she was holding the little girl up to.

"George?" he was dimly aware that Sadie was peering at him, confused. "George, what's wrong?"

"I know her." He put his head in his hands, then looked back up, eyes wild. "I know her. The little girl's mother, I met her-" he trailed off. "I knew her before I came to Jodie, when she was a kid, oh my God, Sadie, I *know* her."

Concern, then empathy, crossed Sadie's face. "One of your students?" Not having time to explain, George simply nodded.

"Oh George." She kissed the side of his head sweetly. "I'm so sorry."

He nodded, turned, and numbly walked up the stairs to bed, unable to say a single word more.

As he lay there that night in the silence-marred only by Sadie's soft breathing and occasional snores-he knew that he had no choice but to go to Nebraska. Satisfied, then, he began to drift into sleep himself, not even realizing that he'd been so shaken by the image of Beverly on the screen that he hadn't looked in on the girls.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Everything dies, baby, that's a fact. but maybe everything that dies someday comes back.

-Bruce Springsteen

The voice had always been a part of Deborah.

As long as she could remember, she could hear it. Sometimes it came when she was all alone in a quiet room, other times it spoke to her from some place just over her shoulder in a room full of people.

"You don't belong here," it would tell her. "You never should have been born. Get out! Leave! Scram!"

She supposed that Donna must've heard it too. They were twins, after all, identical twins. So if Deborah could hear it, she didn't see any reason why Donna wouldn't.

"Everybody hears that, Debs," Donna said the first time she brought it up, rolling her eyes. "Negative self-talk, remember?"

Deborah had shaken her head, insisting it was different, and Donna had folded her arms, called her crazy.

If she'd known what to look for, she'd have seen the fear, the uncertainty in Donna's eyes. But she hadn't, and so, for the first time since her conception, Deborah Amberson had felt totally alone.

The voice had seen this as a triumph. "See!" it had jeered that night as Deborah laid in bed with her pillow over her head, the only other sound besides the whirring fan her sister's soft snoring not three feet away. "Not even your sister wants you here, Debbie! Not even your own twin sister! You don't belong here and you never have!"

That night, she'd jammed the pillow harder, closed her eyes tight, and willed it to go away. But it didn't. It never did-she suspected it never would.

And so, on the night that Eden Hanscom met her grisly end in a backyard nearly 800 miles away, Deborah Amberson packed a bag, climbed out her window, and left Jodie, Texas forever.

August 1989

Lincoln, Nebraska

The old sense had stirred up long before Beverly had arrived at Karen's house, shortly after 2:30 in the afternoon.

It popped up sometimes, even now. A stirring on the back of her neck, the tightening in her belly, a feeling of *wrong* that didn't quite have a name, something deeper than anxiety, more pervasive than dread, an ancient and primordial feeling as old as the thing that had given it to her.

Ben said he felt it too, and he was sure that if she called up Mike or Bill or Richie they'd say the same thing. She supposed he was right. If they had fought the thing maybe 20 years later, the word for it would have been PTSD, but even then, Beverly would have always supposed that it was even bigger than that. How do you name something when you cannot possibly explain its origins?

She pushed it down, most of the time. Could ignore it. *Count her blessings*, her mother used to say, and that was what she did. Counted her beautiful life, her handsome husband, the bond they shared, their beautiful child, her successful business and Ben's, the life that they'd built for themselves, counted every last sweet blessing until they were all that was left. Some days-like today-it was a little bit harder. A little bit more pervasive, a little bit more niggling, as if the dust of It still covered every square inch of the planet that Beverly inhabited.

It had grown so strong by the time she rounded the corner of Smith Street that she'd begun to feel nauseous. She longed for Ben, then, for his large, reassuring hand on her back, for Eden's soft giggle, but even recalling those things felt like they were no use at all, the bile of the feeling rising up in her throat, sitting there in her mouth, threatening to spill out.

The feeling was so strong that the sight of the police car was almost,

hysterically, expected. "*Oh, there's a police car!*" she thought, almost giddy with anxiety, "*I'm gonna walk up there and find Eden dead, stabbed to death by that untrustworthy cunt of a babysitter!*" It wasn't a nice thing to think, and Beverly knew that, made a mental note to be extra nice to Karen when she went in, reasoning with herself that the police car was probably for Karen's neighbor's delinquent son-he was always doing something or another that was getting him in trouble, be it smoking behind the school or throwing cherry bombs at elementary school kids. Stupid stuff, juvenile delinquent stuff. "*Henry Bowers stuff,*" her brain thought, and once again, she had to swallow the vomit back.

She could have gone on thinking that-deluding herself, really, but nonetheless-until she actually walked into the house and was greeted by Ben's stony face, Karen's wailing, and the sympathetic eyes of Officers Dollanger and Chrismuth, almost, if it weren't for spotting Ben's car out of the corner of her eye, parked across the street.

The car was unmistakeably Ben's-there was the Hanscom & Partners parking pass on the rear view mirror, the top of Eden's car seat poking out from behind the passenger's seat, the hip-swaying Elvis doll shellacked to the dashboard ("*Are you really going to put such an ugly thing on the dashboard of such a nice car?*" she'd giggled when he did it. It was a brand new BMW sedan. "*It makes Edie laugh,*" was his explanation, and Beverly could find no fault in that)-and even if somehow it had been stripped of all these features, she'd still have known, somehow.

On leaden legs, she got out of her own car, walking stiffly up the path to the house as if being guided by some invisible force, dimly, numbly aware that something was very, very wrong.

Ben had been the first one out of the house. He'd been sitting with his back to the picture window in the living room and had heard her pull up, jumping to his feet. "*My wife,*" he'd explained, wanting-no, *needing*-to get to her first. He crossed the lawn and embraced her, holding her as tightly against him as he had that day so many years ago in the Barrens, when Henry and Belch had nearly ended them both. That was it-that memory, worn on the edges like a well-loved page in a scrapbook, but still sharp and clear-was the tipping point, the cue her body had been looking for-and, without warning for

anybody, she made an awful choking noise before vomiting suddenly, forcefully, all over Ben, just in time for Officers Dollanger and Chrismuth to come out of the house.

She drew back, eyes wide, hand clapped over her mouth. Ben stumbled backward, shocked, and they both stood in silence for a few seconds, looking at each other.

And then, the strangest thing happened: Beverly Hanscom began to laugh. She fell forward, hands on her knees, laughing so hard that her whole body shook. It was a kind of laughter that bewildered even her, a full body laugh that made her sides hurt and her eyes water. A contagious one, too, because soon Ben was laughing, and then they were sitting together on the lawn of Karen Millington's house at 8601 Smith Street, Ben still covered in Beverly's sick, embracing each other and laughing until the shock faded away, and, just as suddenly, she began to weep. Ben pulled her closer, rubbed her back, kissed her forehead.

"Edie died," he said softly. Saying the words made it more real somehow, and now he was crying, too.

"I know." Beverly's voice was muffled. "I know, I know, I know."

Officer Dollanger, bewildered by the whole scene, had taken a step forward, intending to speak to them both, but Chrismuth put a hand on his shoulder, shaking his head. "Let it be, Marty." He'd seen, God forbid, enough homicides of children to know that when the parents weren't involved, sometimes they needed a little extra time. He'd never seen a scene quite like this one, but he'd seen enough to know that anything goes, really.

Finally, when the Hanscoms had stopped weeping (and Mr Hanscom had divested himself of his dirty shirt), Don nodded, and Martin moved forward, solemnly, speaking to Beverly in a low tone. Don stood off to the side, observing the way that Ben steadied Beverly with a hand on his back, the way she shrunk into him, holding onto him for dear life. It struck him, suddenly, from somewhere he couldn't quite place that this was not the first time the Hanscoms had faced a tragedy together.

When Martin had finished talking to them, Don led them all back into the house. Eden's body had been taken away by then, but the crime scene team was still in the backyard, taking pictures, searching for any evidence they could find-and there was precious little.

In the living room, Don sat opposite the stony-faced Hanscoms and explained that every avenue would be explored, and that if they needed anything, he and Martin were just a phone call away. He asked them if there was anything he could do for them right then. When they shook their heads, he handed them his card, gave Ben a firm handshake, and encouraged them to go home and rest while the police handled the rest. \

It wasn't until after officers Chrismuth and Dollanger had left that Karen finally spoke, addressing Beverly and Ben for the first time. "I didn't have anything to do with this, I swear," she said, voice pleading. "I *loved* Eden, I'd never have done anything to hurt her. She was only alone for a minute, I-"

Beverly leaned her head on Ben's shoulder, suddenly feeling very, very tired. "I know," she said softly. "There was nothing you could've done." And then she got to her feet, Ben following behind her, both of them exchanging a private glance. "We have to go, Karen. I'm sorry this happened here." And then they left, leaving Karen to wonder what, exactly, the Hanscoms knew that she didn't.

August 1989

Derry, Maine

This time, it was Mike who was surprised by the phone call.

If he'd had seen the news, he perhaps would have had some flicker of precognition, but he had not. It had been a particularly nice summer in Derry, warm and sunny, and he'd spent most of his time outdoors. And so, when the phone rang he picked it up with a pleasant tone and absolutely no idea of what was to come.

"It's back," the voice on the other end told him flatly. "It killed Eden."

It took him several long moments to realize what was happening, to

place the voice in the fog of his memories. "Ben?" he asked, bewildered.

"Ben," the voice on the other end agreed. "Mike, it's back."

"What's back? What happened? Slow down." Even though Ben was talking perfectly slowly.

"It," Ben repeated, and suddenly, Mike understood. "It killed Eden, Mike."

"Eden-Eden? Your *daughter*, Eden?" The pieces were falling into place now, and Mike felt his stomach sinking.

There was a beat of silence. "Yeah," he said, finally, and then, "we need you, Mike. You and Richie and Bill...we need you all."

"I-" Mike sighed, suddenly longing for a drink. "Yeah. We'll come. We'll come." The words surprised even him, but they'd come so naturally he knew he was powerless against them, that ancient life force drawing them back together, the way they were supposed to be.

"You will?" for the first time, an edge of emotion in Ben's voice. Relief, yes, but a deep sorrow, too.

"Yeah. Yeah, of course. Of course."

Another pause on the other end of the line. "I'm sorry," Ben's voice said finally.

"Don't be," Mike reassured him. "Don't be. We're coming."

As soon as he hung up, he sat down heavily at his table, staring into space for a long moment. The intervening four years had been quiet. Normal. Mike himself had begun to forget, what with the evilness sucked out of Derry. But now, suddenly, he remembered. Remembered it all. It seemed impossible; unfathomable. Like some kind of cruel joke. A prank. But Ben's voice had not sounded like it was a prank, and so, gathering his resolve, Mike Hanlon picked up the phone.

He called Bill first. He lived not far out of town, on a sprawling

acreage. They saw each other once in awhile, had companionable dinners the way old friends did, but neither of them spoke of It, or their time with the Losers. Mike was certain that, like his own, Bill's memories had begun to fade. When he called, Bill sounded downright thrilled to hear from him, voice warm when Mike introduced himself. "Mike! Long time, how are you, my friend?"

Mike sighed, letting a heavy silence for the line for a moment before he spoke. "Ben and Beverly's little girl died today," he said, finally.

"Ben and-" through the line, Mike could practically see the lightbulb over Bill's head switching on. "Oh. Oh my God."

"...yeah. They asked me to call you."

"That's awful. Is there a funeral? We should go, right? We'll go."

Mike hesitated. "They...they think It did it, Bill."

"They think wha-oh. Oh my God."

"I know. I know."

"We killed It." Mike could hear Bill's breathing, hard and panicked. "We killed It, Mike, how could it-"

Mike sighed. "I don't know, Bill. I don't know. I just know that their daughter is dead and they think It did it. They want us to come."

Silence. Then the heavy, panicked breathing. Then. "I d-d-don't think we can b-beat It a-a-a-again."

The stutter. The fucking *stutter*. Mike bit his lip. "I don't either, Big Bill," he said. "I don't either. But."

"...we h-h-h-have to g-go."

"We do," Mike agreed. "We have to go." Another long pause, and then he added, "I'll call Richie. I don't think you're in any place to, there, Stuttering Bill."

To his warm and pleasant surprise, Bill laughed at that, and it was

just infectious enough to get Mike laughing, too. Maybe Bill was right. Maybe they couldn't beat It again. But maybe that didn't matter. Maybe all that mattered was that they'd be together again.

August 1989

Los Angeles, California

Richie Tozier, hot off his morning show, was half asleep when the phone rang. He had half a mind to ignore it-anyone who knew him would know he was sleeping at this hour, and none of them would ever even bother, knowing he'd just ignore it. But he was waiting on a call from a pretty blonde he'd met a few nights ago and he wasn't about to let *that* slip away. So, half-asleep, fumbling, he picked up. "Hello?"

"Richie, hi."

Richie allowed himself a moment of disappointment. Not the blonde. He couldn't quite place the voice, really-it was familiar in some nebulous way. "Sorry, who's this?"

"It's Mike Hanlon, Richie."

Suddenly, instantly, Richie was very much awake. "Weel weel weel," he intoned, somewhere between Russian and German, "if it eesent my old friend Mike Hanlon!"

"Beep beep, Richie," Mike said comanionably enough, and Richie smiled, suppressing the feeling of Wrong that was growing in his chest.

"What can I do for ya, Mikey?" he asked, trying to keep his voice light, cheerful.

A few seconds of dead air, and then, "Can you come?"

Richie felt his heart drop out into his stomach. "To Derry?"

"Well." pause. "To Lincoln, actually."

"Lincoln? Nebraska? What the fuck's in Nebraska?"

"Ben and Beverly," Mike said, and recognition finally dawned for Richie. "Their, uh, their baby died, Richie."

At once, Richie felt a pang in his chest, an ache so deep he wasn't sure where it even came from. "That's too bad," he said, finally. "They want us to come for the funeral?"

"Not exactly." Mike's voice was regretful. "They think..."

"No." Richie closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Nope. No way. No fucking way."

"I know," Mike agreed. "I know. But they need us, Richie. We can't let them down. Will you come?"

There was a long, heavy silence. "I never even met the kid, Mike," he said finally. "Hell, I didn't even know we could HAVE..." Suddenly, something clicked in Richie, an awful feeling in his gut, like things all of a sudden made perfect sense. He was quiet, counting down from 10, then 20, then 50 in his head, so quiet that Mike thought the line had gone dead when he spoke up again. "I'll come," he said finally. "Yeah, I'll come."

"Thank you." Mike's voice was warm, and Richie knew he meant it. "I knew I could count on you, Richie."

"Yeah. See you soon, Mike." He slammed the phone down on the receiver, sitting up at the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. It was a death mission, he thought. If they had to fight that thing again, none of them would come out alive.

But still. He suddenly had a vision, a memory he'd somehow forgotten for all these years, a memory that hadn't even been dragged back up during his last trip to Derry. It must've only been a few months, maybe a year before his family had left there for good. He and Bev and Mike were the only three left, but Mike went to a different school and that whole school year was just he and Bev. They'd absolutely stuck to each other-and only each other-that whole year. He couldn't even remember if he'd ever spoken so much as a word to another kid that entire school year.

One of them-he suspected it was Bev, because it seemed like the kind of shit she could've talked him into-had decided that they would enter the talent show, learn to do a Lindy Hop and dance as their talent. Neither one of them were very good at it-Bev was better than he was, of course, but still pretty abysmal-but they'd had so much fun. Someone-*who?*-had eventually taught them to slow the record down while they were learning, and miracle of miracles, it had worked. He was pretty sure they'd even won that year, him and Bev. What song was it that they danced to? *In The Mood*, that was it, by Glenn Miller. Silly old song.

Humming it to himself, he got off the bed and began to pack.